

# Dhaka likely to get fully equipped school for children with disabilities

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The government is set to establish a modern and fully equipped school for children with disabilities in Dhaka, aiming to ease the acute shortage of quality education and therapy services for children with neurodevelopmental disorders and other disabilities in the capital.

The new institution, Ashar Alo School Dhaka, will be built under a project taken by the Ministry of Social Welfare.

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Rhe Department of Social Services will implement the project with technical support from the Bangladesh Navy.

According to the development project proposal, the project will run from July 2025 to December 2027 at a cost of Tk 49.56 crore.

Of this, Tk 29.73 crore will come from the government and Tk 19.82 crore from the Navy's own funds.

The restructured DPP has been forwarded to the Planning Commission for approval.

Dhaka North City Corporation has 43,846 children with children with disabilities, according to census 2022 and Social Welfare Ministry data.

Yet the area has only 10 specialised schools — meaning nearly 95 per cent of children remain without access to appropriate educational or therapeutic support.

Against this backdrop, the new school in Joar Sahara, Khilkhet, under DNCC, is expected to significantly expand access in an area where demand drastically outweighs supply.

The project includes the construction of a six-storey foundation with a four-storey functional school building.

It will accommodate 300 students, with 30 per cent receiving free education.

The facility will also provide residential care for five abandoned or orphaned children with disabilities.

Designed as a model school, the Dhaka campus will feature physiotherapy and occupational therapy, speech and language therapy, psychotherapy, hydrotherapy, sensory parks and recreational areas, counselling services for parents, vocational training space, a playground and landscaped outdoor areas.

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The aim is to strengthen both academic and vocational learning so that children with disabilities can develop confidence, independence and the skills needed for social integration, officials said.

The initiative supports the government's obligations under the Persons with Disabilities' Rights and Protection Act 2013 and is aligned with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

It also fits within the broader goals of the Perspective Plan 2021–2041, which focuses on building an inclusive and equitable society.

The Ashar Alo special education model began in 2003 in Chattogram under the patronage of the Bangladesh Navy.

The school quickly earned recognition for its high-quality education, healthcare and vocational training for children with NDDs.

A second branch opened in Khulna's Khalishpur in 2016. Together, they now serve nearly 400 children.

The Navy conducted a needs assessment for Dhaka, which shaped the new DPP. Key components of the project include constructing the non-residential academic building, electrical works, water and sanitation systems, furniture, fixtures, and landscaping.

Planning Commission officials said that the project had strong justification and could make a 'meaningful and lasting impact' on the lives of thousands of special needs children in the capital.

More than half of children with disabilities in Bangladesh remain outside the formal education system, according to national data.

The information comes from the National Survey on Persons with Disabilities 2021, carried out by the Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics with UNICEF's technical assistance.

The survey shows that among children aged 5–17 with disabilities, only 65 per cent attend primary school and just 35 per cent are enrolled in secondary school.

Overall, 60 per cent of children with disabilities in this age group are not receiving any education.

The study also reveals that even those who do attend school are, on average, more than two years behind academically compared to their peers.

According to the data, 1.7 per cent of Bangladeshi children have at least one of the 12 types of disabilities defined in the Persons with Disability Rights and Protection Act 2013, while 3.6 per cent experience functional difficulties in areas such as seeing, hearing, mobility,

fine motor skills, communication, learning, playing or behaviour control.